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## Puerto Rico

Gov. Rosselló Says Administration Will File Legislation to Create County System of Government, Cites Potential Annual Savings Between \$600M and \$1B

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Gov. Ricardo Rosselló said today his administration will file legislation to create a county system of government that, if implemented properly, could realize savings of between \$600 million and \$1 billion annually.

The governor could not specify when the bill would be submitted, but said it would be in the current session that runs through June. Rosselló said that undertaking a local government reform to establish a county system would not require a constitutional amendment or public referendum, but noted that he would be open to a vote, adding that he is convinced the public would support such a change because they know it is necessary.

"I recognize this is not an easy conversation to have, but we have to have the conversation, with the mayors and the people of Puerto Rico," the governor said.

Rosselló acknowledged opposition to the plan from Senate President Thomas Rivera Schatz and many island mayors. The governor added that he is open to other alternatives, but said that he would "start the conversation" by filing a bill to establish a county system of government.

The governor emphasized that the municipalities would remain in place, but many of the services they deliver would be spun off into the new country structure. He said he is also proposing spinning off central government services ino the new county structure, mentioning areas including healthcare, social and family services, and police. Rosselló stressed that the counties needed to be autonomous and their officials could not be nominated by governor or chosen by mayors.

Earlier this week, Rosselló remarked that action needs to be taken to shore up the financial situation of the island municipalities. The governor reiterated today that the move to a county government system is necessary because, absent such reform, 80% of the island's 78 municipalities will be inoperable within five years due to their financial condition. He said the few municipalities with the resources to continue providing services would be able to do so under the plan.

The governor made his remarks today during a press conference to announce the start of construction to convert two units at the Puerto Rico Electric Power Authority's San Juan power plant to burn natural gas. Officials said the conversion should save about \$150 million a year and lower power prices by 1.3 cents per kilowatt hour. Project developer New Fortress Energy will not be able to source natural gas from the United States because of Jones Act restrictions, CEO Wes Edens said during the event.

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